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MENTAL HYGIENE AND RURAL SANITATION

HEARINGS

BEFORE

THE COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SIXTY-THIRD CONGRESS

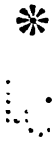
THIRD SESSION

ON

H. R. 16637

A BILL TO PROVIDE DIVISIONS OF MENTAL HYGIENE AND RURAL SANITATION IN THE UNITED STATES PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE

DECEMBER 15, 1914



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DIVISIONS OF MENTAL HYGIENE AND RURAL SANITATION.

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,
COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE,
Tuesday, December 15, 1914.

The committee met at 10.30 o'clock a. m., Hon. William C. Adamson (chairman) presiding.

The CHAIRMAN. We will take up now a public health bill (H. R. 16637) to provide divisions of mental hygiene and rural sanitation in the United States Public Health Service. There is a favorable report from the department on it, but if any of you gentlemen want any special information on the subject there are several distinguished representatives of the Public Health Service present this morning, and they can furnish it. If you desire any further information you can ask Surg. Gen. Blue or these other doctors present.

Mr. ESCH. Let us hear the witnesses.

The CHAIRMAN. Here is the written statement on the bill, which can be read:

TREASURY DEPARTMENT,
OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY,
Washington, May 25, 1914.

The CHAIRMAN COMMITTEE ON INTERSTATE AND FOREIGN COMMERCE,
United States House of Representatives.

SIR: I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 20th instant, inclosing copy of bill H. R. 16637, entitled "A bill to provide divisions of mental hygiene and rural sanitation in the United States Public Health Service," and requesting the views of the department concerning the same.

In reply I would state that the Public Health Service now has authority to make investigations of diseases of man and conditions influencing the propagation and spread thereof, including sanitation. The essential object of this bill, therefore, is to provide improved administrative facilities for carrying on systematic studies in mental hygiene and rural sanitaton.

It is conservatively estimated that there are now in the United Stated 250,000 insane persons and 300,000 mental defectives. The influence of these abnormal states on the production of pauperism and criminality and on race development requires systematic investigation to determine their causes and methods of prevention.

The social, economic, and public health problems involved affect not only each State but the Nation as a whole. Some studies are now being made, but they should be extended, and there is need of correlating all existing data, in order that they may be made available to protect the mental health of the public at large and to ameliorate conditions among those already suffering from mental disorders. This work can well be done through a division such as is contemplated.

Enlarged facilities are also needed in the central bureau of the Public Health Service with which to advance rural sanitation. Studies of this subject, with special reference to typhoid fever, malaria, and other diseases, are now under way, and the work is of such volume as to require an additional division for its proper conduct. Over 50 per cent of the total population of the United States is rural. Urban centers are far ahead of rural communities in measures for the protection of the public health. In fact, these latter should be the particular

object of attention of the Federal and State Governments from a public-health standpoint, to the end that efficient local health organization shall be effeced.

The creation of the two divisions contemplated will in reality provide for rearrangement of present work and the assignment of one additional medical officer for each to carry on the work, which officers are already in the employ of the Government. With the exception of the employment of additional necessary clerks, for which there is already authority in law, there would be little additional expense, and the enactment of the bill into law would be a further step in improving public-health organization. I am heartily in favor of the measure, therefore, and strongly urge that it be enacted into law.

Respectfully,

(Signed) CHARLES S. HAMLIN,
Assistant Secretary.

The CHAIRMAN. He does not specify what the expense will be. Can you tell us what the additional expense will be, Doctor?

STATEMENT OF DR. RUPERT BLUE, SURGEON GENERAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE.

Dr. BLUE. The importance of scientific research in connection with mental defection has been amply demonstrated in the past five years. It has been shown that many cases of insanity are amenable to treatment, and that many other cases can be prevented by the application of proper hygienic measures.

The CHAIRMAN. I do not think they are desirous of any general hearing on this bill, but I would be glad if you would tell us what the additional expense will be.

Dr. BLUE. There will be no appropriation necessary at this time.

The CHAIRMAN. What will it be next year or in the future?

Dr. BLUE. We propose to detail a medical officer in the bureau in charge of each division, and each will probably need two clerks.

The CHAIRMAN. What will that additional expense amount to?

Dr. BLUE. A clerk of class 3 and class 1 in each division would be ample to begin with.

The CHAIRMAN. It will be nothing this year, you say, and how many thousands of dollars will it be next year and in subsequent years?

Dr. BLUE. Dr. Kerr here is in charge of that work, and I would be glad if you would hear from him.

STATEMENT OF DR. J. W. KERR, ASSISTANT SURGEON GENERAL PUBLIC HEALTH SERVICE.

Dr. KERR. Mr. Chairman, the work that is represented——

The CHAIRMAN (interposing). All I want to know is what the additional cost will be. I want to know that because somebody will ask about it on the floor.

Dr. KERR. Mr. Chairman, I think that in the immediate future the employment of two, or, at most, three clerks at an approximate cost of not over $3,000 or $3,200 for each division would be sufficient.

The CHAIRMAN. Is that the total?

Dr. KERR. That is the total. The work that is contemplated is in a measure going on now, but it should be amplified, and there should be means in the bureau to carry it on.

The CHAIRMAN. Do you contemplate in connection with that any activities further than the gathering and disseminating of information and cooperating with the State authorities where they desire it?

Dr. KERR. No, sir; those are the only functions that we can carry out. Some of the reasons why this should be done and what is the attitude of the Federal Government toward it can be explained if I may have a few minutes. The population of our country is receiving an addition of 1,500,000 immigrants every year, and they are examined. Last year we examined and certified over 1,000 insane persons.

The CHAIRMAN. That was done under the present law?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir. In accomplishing that we have worked out tests for the detection of mental defection which are now being adopted in other States. As we have gone into this we have followed the immigrants into the country to see what becomes of them and the reason why there has been such an increase of insanity within the last few years, and it has undoubtedly increased——

The CHAIRMAN (interposing). In other words, your experience has enabled you to secure this information and to diagnose the cases, and it is your purpose to disseminate this information throughout the country?

Dr. KERR. That is it. We recognize the fact that there are a great many insane in this country who are being kept in jails and almshouses. For instance, in a State like Massachusetts, where the insane are kept properly, it is believed that much can be done with the insane by parole and proper care. All of these facts should be collected, so that when desired they can be placed before the country.

Mr. ESCH. How is it that the insane and defective classes can come into the United States under our immigration laws?

Dr. KERR. Manifestly insane persons do not get in, but those influences that bring about insanity are present with the immigrants after landing, and because of the additional strain that is imposed upon them a certain proportion of them are bound to give way mentally.

Mr. ESCH. If that condition is developed a certain number of years after entrance they can still be deported, can they not?

Dr. KERR. Within three years; but the request has been made in a recent immigration bill that that period shall be extended to five years. The studies that have been made in the cities will be of great help in the States. At the present time there is an officer of our service working with the New York authorities making studies of mental delinquency. The problem has come to be a very serious one.

Mr. ESCH. An appeal has been made to Congress for financial aid in taking care of insane immigrants.

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir. The work of this division would be to act as a clearing house for information and to compile it. This is information that can be given with little or no expense, and a part of the work will be to standardize methods of examination of alien or immigrant defectives, and another work would be to investigate mentally defective and backward children, in conjunction with other Government agencies.

Mr. ESCH. Would this necessitate an enlargement of your field force?

Dr. KERR. No, sir; it would not mean any enlargement of the field force at the present time, because we have a field force scattered all over the country. If we have, for instance, an immigrant at Spokane, Wash., who is insane and who is reported as having landed within

three years at New York, we could order our officer at Seattle to go to Spokane and examine him.

Mr. ESCH. Of course, the establishment of these two divisions would result in the publication of a good many additional bulletins?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; and the work of digesting the facts that are available for publication——

Mr. ESCH. Of course, if your work is to be of use to anybody you must make it public, and that means the publication of bulletins. I take it that that would be the largest expense?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; and giving advice to the States, which is a part of the work that we are doing now. Selection would be made of officers who are already in the service. Officers would be detailed to make studies in the various States.

Mr. ESCH. Would this entail any increase in your laboratory force?

Dr. KERR. No, sir. There will be, of course, causes of insanity and causes of mental defections to be studied, and, perhaps, a little enlargement in the future, or as much as the country may deem wise. I say that because insanity is a preventable disease. A large amount of the insanity in this country is due to two causes, syphilis and alcoholism. Twenty per cent of all first admissions to hospitals for the insane are on account of the acute psychoses due to alcoholism. A large amount of general paresis or paralysis of the insane, indeed, practically all of it, is attributable to syphilis. Two years ago there were 499 deaths from typhoid fever in New York, and in the same period of time there were over 500 cases of general paresis admitted to the hospitals in that city, and every one of those cases was due to syphilis. In the last 25 years we have treated over one and a quarter million seamen, and one-fifth of that number were admitted to hospitals on account of venereal diseases in acute stages. Studies should be made not only of that group or class suffering from such diseases, but they should be made of those from other walks of life. Studies should be made as to the percentage of those cases that ultimately develop paresis, locomotor ataxia, or other mental disorders which are practically always due to syphilis. So much for the division of mental hygiene.

Mr. MONTAGUE. Your work will be confined mainly to the study of immigrants, will it not?

Dr. KERR. Not wholly to immigrants, but mainly to immigrants, because they are a particular charge of ours at the present time. It is the purpose to collect information as to the care of the insane and mentally defective and the methods of handling them, in order that possibly their cost to the country may be decreased. We will study the cost of caring for the insane and mentally defective in this country and the expense incurred by State governments in those States where the disease is adequately provided for——

The CHAIRMAN. Under the existing law it is already your duty to examine all immigrants?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir.

The CHAIRMAN. And you wish to disseminate the information you have obtained as the result of your experience?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; and to the end that the status of the disease and the effects of this large mass of immigrants on the future type of American citizen shall be studied and the facts compiled from year to year. This work, in our opinion, will be of great value to the country.

Mr. MONTAGUE. Do you make any studies of the heredity of immigrants? Do you go back any distance in studying their forebears?

Dr. KERR. We have taken as much advantage as possible to study immigrants from a number of standpoints—for instance, from the anthropological side—and we have also studied the question of defects. We have taken the measurements of children, and we have examined into the record of their physical disabilities in relation to age and nationality. We have taken the measurements of large numbers of children from among immigrants to compare them with the average American child. We have taken the measurements of children in schools, and we propose to use a radiograph process to determine the degree of development of children at certain ages. Ellis Island is an excellent place for that kind of study, which will be of great value to the country.

Mr. MONTAGUE. There are not many States that have not provided hospitals or asylums for the insane and for the study of the causes of insanity upon the most highly scientific basis, are there?

Dr. KERR. There are certain States which have made admirable studies of their insane, and of this whole subject, but there are other States which have made practically none. There are States that treat their insane and mentally defective as they would their prisoners. It is not because of hard-heartedness, however, but it is because of a lack of knowledge or a lack of appreciation of what can be done for these people in the way of treatment. Within the last three months we made an examination of one school in response to a request from a committee of Congress, or in response to a resolution of a committee of Congress, and among 361 school children we found 5 insane children and several mental defectives whose presence was not known at all. Those 5 children should have been in an asylum, and several others should have been in some school especially devoted to the teaching of backward children.

The CHAIRMAN. As I understand it, the law passed two years ago invests you with ample authority to make all of these investigations, but you have no specific divisions in your bureau to conduct the work, and what you want in this bill is the necessary machinery to carry on the work.

Dr. KERR. We have ample authority, and all that we want is some organization in the bureau to do all these things and to digest this information so that it will be available.

The CHAIRMAN. The only thing that this bill proposes is to authorize you to form a division to do the things that the law already authorized you to do.

Dr. KERR. That is all. You are, perhaps, aware of the great interest taken in recent years and at the present time throughout the country in the development of the public health organization.

Mr. TALCOTT. You already have men qualified for this work?

Dr. KERR. We have in the neighborhood of a half a dozen or a dozen men who would devote their entire time to mental diseases.

Mr. TALCOTT. They have had experience in asylums, have they not?

Dr. KERR. They have had experience as internes and as house physicians in insane hospitals throughout the country. They have been engaged in this work of segragating insane and mentally defective immigrants at Ellis Island and elsewhere, and this work has

placed them in a position to act as authorities and advisors to the States.

Mr. TALCOTT. Do you think that at Ellis Island and similar places there are adequate means provided and in force to keep out insane people?

Dr. KERR. I think that the improvement there on account of the additional officers that have been provided has been remarkable in the recent past. I think that the question of the adequacy of a system of examination must be determined after we know what the country wants. If the country wants these immigrants examined upon the ground that they are going to be eligible for service in the Army or Navy, I would say no.

Mr. TALCOTT. How about citizenship?

Dr. KERR. Well, a man might come in with a fairly weak body and yet make a wonderful success in the arts and sciences.

The CHAIRMAN. The House will meet in about five minutes, and I want to take the sense of the committee on the question of reporting this bill. As I understand it, this bill simply authorizes you to form a separate division in order to give you the machinery to do something that the law already authorizes you to do?

Dr. KERR. It authorizes two separate divisions with no additional field force. There will be required an additional clerk or two for each division, but there would be no added Government expense other than that.

The CHAIRMAN. I think you said there would be an added expense of $3,200 a year?

Dr. KERR. I should say that two or three clerks would be required. It would mean $3,000 or $3,500 a year for each division to take care of the clerical force that would be required.

The CHAIRMAN. That would be $7,000 for the two divisions?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir. I should think that would be a liberal estimate for the clerical force that would be required.

Mr. MONTAGUE. You made a statement that was very interesting to me and rather surprising also. You stated that many States of the Union, in the administration of their insane hospitals, treated the inmates more as prisoners than as patients afflicted with disease.

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir.

Mr. MONTAGUE. That statement was surprising to me.

Dr. KERR. There is a great movement in this matter to encourage the States to provide places for the State care of the insane and mentally defective. Massachusetts and New York and some other States have their insane segregated in large institutions which are adequately manned and cared for, but in certain other States the insane are still kept in almshouses and jails.

Mr. MONTAGUE. But they are only kept in jails temporarily, are they not?

Dr. KERR. They are kept there temporarily, not because of crime, but because that is the only provision made.

Mr. MONTAGUE. Do you mean that some States have no hospitals at all for the care of the insane?

Dr. KERR. In some States there are not adequate hospital facilities. You understand, there are two kinds of care provided, State care and county care, and in the counties where there are but a few insane persons they can not make adequate provision for them.

Mr. ESCH. If a reliable test for syphilis were made upon immigrants, would it not lessen very largely the number of insane immigrants admitted?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; and it would throw additional light on the question. We have a laboratory at Ellis Island where we are examining them, and we are finding a considerable number of syphiletics among the immigrants that we had not found before.

Mr. ESCH. And they are kept under observation?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir. Of course, when you use the Wassermann test, you can then make an accurate diagnosis.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. The first paragraph of the bill provides that the officers in charge of these divisions shall be assistant surgeons general; will that result in an increase of grade for any officer; and if so, will that increase of grade result in increased compensation to any commissioned officers?

Dr. KERR. That would provide for a temporary increase only during their detail in the bureau, just as the division officers are now.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. That would really be a permanent increase of grade, so far as compensation from the Treasury would be concerned?

Dr. KERR. It would be additional, and that fact I overlooked in mentioning the clerical force. But, of course, it would only apply to those officers who are assigned to the bureau temporarily.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. But when one succeeded another it would be a permanent increase, so far as the Treasury is concerned?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. Is there not a provision of law by which your bureau has authority to call in the State health authorities and confer with them twice a year?

Dr. KERR. Once a year. The Surgeon General is required to call that conference once a year.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. Have you not practically the same power that you would have with these divisions? Could you do more under this provision than you can do now through that medium or conference?

Dr. KERR. That conference is a clearing house, and I have assumed that its object was to discuss and sign conventions ad referendum, so to speak.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. You can do anything you please——

Dr. KERR (interposing). That is not a working conference. It does not compile data, but it is for the brief discussion of administrative actions that the States must take in concert. The object of this is simply to provide in the bureau for an officer who is competent to direct the collection of data and to give advice to those who require it throughout the country.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. But you could enlarge the scope of that conference in any way you saw fit under the law?

Dr. KERR. Not to meet this situation. This conference is composed of the active health officers of the country. The question of the insane and mentally defective classes is handled by men who are expert in the highest degree, and it is a question largely of the care of dependents, and these questions would have been handled by experts along those lines. The object of this is to get together information and make it available to the people throughout the States. It

is the purpose to standardize, as far as possible, the methods of examination of delinquents and insane persons.

Mr. F. C. STEVENS. Your real object is to encourage some States to change their methods of caring for the mentally defective?

Dr. KERR. To improve the methods of caring for defectives and to improve the methods of examining delinquent children. In other words, encourage mental hygiene, which is fitting people for the task that they are able to accomplish and not the task that they aspire to undertake.

Mr. ESCH. You confine your efforts with regard to rural sanitation to communicable diseases.

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; because if we devote attention to a few communicable diseases, the general effect will be such that it will reduce the death rates from other diseases. For instance, in 1911, in the State of Washington, one of our officers, who is here present, made a study of typhoid fever in Yakima County, and as a result of that study typhoid fever was reduced in that county by 90 per cent that year. The typhoid rate before that year had been over 200 to 100,000 of population, and it had been high for years. The records since that time have shown that typhoid fever has not risen, and the mortality records of North Yakima for 1913 showed that as a result of that work there was an actual saving of 100 lives from all causes. We are carrying on the same kind of work in the field this year. From the 1st of April until the 1st of November we had visited and investigated the sanitary conditions of 20,000 rural homes. In one county, with 3,000 homes, we found that 78 per cent of those homes had no privies provided. In other words, every member of those families had to take to the brush on the occasion of a movement of the bowels. The sanitary work of this country is to be done to-day in the rural districts, with the greatest hope of success. In one of the counties where we worked this summer the number of typhoid cases last year, from April 1 to November 1, was 249, while this year it was only 40. To show the cordial reception with which this work is met, in each one of those counties the women were organized into sanitary leagues. In one county there were 2,000 members, and each one has pledged herself to look after conditions in her own home and around her home. In another county there were in the neighborhood of 1,800 women thus organized. As a result of the work this summer, with no expense to the Government except the traveling expenses of the officers, we have been able to have sanitated in the neighborhood of 5,000 privies.

Mr. ESCH. Do you find any difficulty in enforcing quarantine regulations in rural communities because of the want of officers or because of general ignorance of the necessity for quarantine or because of prejudice against quarantine regulations?

Dr. KERR. I do not think there is much prejudice against it. What is needed is to have some one go who will take an interest in the people and show them what is needed. I was raised in the country and know the conditions there, and even in the best sections of the country the sanitary conditions are not what they should be. In my judgment it is not long hours and hard work that is driving young people from the farms, but it is lack of bathtubs and the absence of amusements. Those are the things that ought to be encouraged, and it must be done through the States and communities. The great

object of this work is to reach and encourage local health organization.

Mr. CULLOP. Your idea is that the depopulation of the farms is the result of a want of conveniences and entertainment?

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir; I think so. At least, that is a large factor.

Mr. MONTAGUE. Your remedy for that is not a compelling power on the part of the Government, but a persuasive power on the part of the Government?

Dr. KERR. My remedy is to furnish information and to present the facts to the people in an attractive way. After all, it is a question of aiding——

Mr. MONTAGUE (interposing). I used the technical term that lawyers use, "persuasive power."

Dr. KERR. It means the dissemination of information.

Mr. MONTAGUE. Awhile ago I expressed my surprise at your statement that some of the States were so backward in the treatment of their insane.

Dr. KERR. Yes, sir.

Mr. MONTAGUE. It has been a long time since I have read anything about the history of it, but my recollection is that the United States took the initiative in the scientific treatment of insane people. The Society of Friends at Philadelphia established the first hospital in the world for the treatment of insane people on the basis of treating insanity as a disease. Theretofore they had always been treated as people possessed of a demon or some malignant spirit——

Dr. KERR. I think that is true.

Mr. MONTAGUE. The Society of Friends was the first organization in the world to establish a hospital for the treatment of insanity as a disease on a scientific basis. Subsequently, in my own State of Virginia, at Williamsburg, there was established the first government institution for the treatment of insane people on a scientific basis. For that reason, I was rather surprised to know that so little progress had been made along those lines. You have stated that some States had no hospitals or asylums for the care and treatment of insane people.

Dr. KERR. They have places in which to keep their insane, but the problem of insanity and delinquency is approached from the standpoint of caring for these people rather than treating them. What is needed in the care and treatment of the insane is a form of voluntary commitment, so that if a man wants to go into an insane asylum for treatment he can do so. In practically every State in the country he has to go before a court and be practically convicted of insanity before he can be committed to an institution.

Mr. MONTAGUE. That is true, because a great many people in family disputes or quarrels might exercise their malignant power over their kinspeople and have them committed. We are obliged to have some legal form of commitment.

Dr. KERR. Of course, that must be guarded against, and some form of commitment must be provided in order that individuals shall be protected, but if he wants to be committed for treatment, that should be done. Then, if he wants to be paroled out, and if the doctors of the institution believe that a few days' stay with his family would be beneficial to him, there ought to be authority in the law to parole him.

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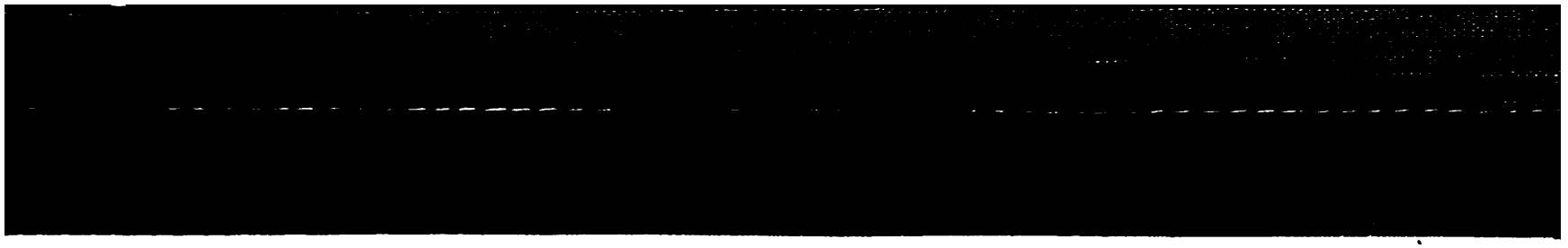

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